

SENATE BILL 556
By Womack

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 4, Chapter 1,
Part 3, to designate *Who We Are* by Margaret Britton
Vaughn as the official Tennessee Bicentennial poem.

WHEREAS, Margaret Britton "Maggi" Vaughn of Bell Buckle is an inspirational poet and
one of the most distinguished interpreters of the rural South; and

WHEREAS, Maggi Vaughn believes strongly in the power of the written word, and she
has devoted her life to bringing the rich and wonderful experience of poetry to everyone she can
possibly reach; and

WHEREAS, her inspiring poems reverberate with the magical incantatory power of
family and roots; as she says, "Poetry is for everyone and we need to keep the touch that is
understood by all walks of life"; and

WHEREAS, in recognition and appreciation of her sterling career in Belle/Lettres, this
General Assembly designated Margaret Britton Vaughn as Poet Laureate of Tennessee in
1995; and

WHEREAS, during her illustrious tenure as Poet Laureate, Maggi Vaughn has fulfilled
the many important duties of this august office with the utmost acumen, aplomb and dedication;
and

WHEREAS, she has composed numerous articulate and moving poems that vividly
capture the pride and sense of belonging we all feel as Tennesseans; and

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WHEREAS, as a part of the special ceremonies celebrating Tennessee's Bicentennial on June 1, 1996, Ms. Vaughn composed and recited an especially inspiring poem entitled *Who We Are*; and

WHEREAS, *Who We Are* simply, yet eloquently, describes, the many prominent persons and inspirational average citizens who comprise the multicultural community known as Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, *Who We Are* also describes the many geographical entities and cultural institutions that make the Volunteer State such a special place to live, evoking the patriotism and citizenship that exemplify the true spirit of Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, because *Who We Are* celebrates this state's 200th birthday with peerless meter and rhyme, this General Assembly finds that this exemplary poem should be specially commemorated as the official Tennessee Bicentennial poem; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 4, Chapter 1, Part 3, is amended by adding the following language as a new, appropriately designated section:

Section 4-1-3____. The poem entitled *Who We Are* by Margaret Britton Vaughn, Poet Laureate of Tennessee, is designated and adopted as the official poem of Tennessee's Bicentennial, which poem reads as follows:

Who We Are

The Bicentennial of Tennessee
1796-1996

The fertile soil of Tennessee
Grew more than corn, tobacco, and cotton,
It grew a crop of people who are
Trailblazers, child raisers, flag wavers, soul savers.
Like the roots of the tulip poplar,
Our feet are planted deeply
Into good living, neighbor giving, God fearing.
Like the iris, buttercup and wild daisies,
Our towns have sprung up
In valleys, basins, mountains, plains and plateaus

That house cabins, mansions and hillside chateaus.
We're the one-room schoolhouse in the hollow;
We're the university grad and the front-porch scholar.
We're Davy Crockett at the Alamo,
Sergeant York, World War I hero.
We're Cordell Hull who served Roosevelt;
We're Chief Sequoyah and his Cherokee alphabet.
We're W.C. Handy and the Memphis Blues;
We're Ida B. Wells and Civil Rights new,
And Grand Ole Opry with old wooden pews.
We're "Rocky Top" and "Tennessee Waltz" the same;
We're "Star Spangled Banner" before the game.
We're mockingbirds singing Appalachian folk songs;
We're country church sing-alongs.
We're hand clappers, toe tappers, knee slappers
And Mama's lap lullaby nappers.
We're Jackson, Johnson and James K. Polk;
We're city slickers and poor hill folk;
We're Anne Dallas Dudley and the Suffrage Vote.
We're John Sevier, Don Sundquist and governors galore;
We're congressmen, mayors and Vice President Gore.
We're Wilma Rudolph's run for the gold
And Sunday golfers' eighteenth hole.
We're Christmas Eve and the Fourth of July;
We're 4-H and homemade chess pie.
We're TVA rivers, creeks and man-made lakes;
We're ruts in dirt roads and interstates.
We're all religions, creeds and peoples of race;
We're Tennesseans who love the home place.
We're the Volunteer State and will always be
Ready to go when someone's in need.
As our trees turn green and our barns turn gray.
We celebrate our two hundredth birthday.
We know we've done our best, stood the test,
And will be laid to rest
In the fertile soil of Tennessee.

SECTION 2. The secretary of state is directed to include the text of *Who We Are* by Margaret Britton Vaughn and pertinent biographical information about Ms. Vaughn as part of the 1997-1998 Tennessee Blue Book.

SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.